

The Light of the Gospel

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's turn to that New Testament passage, 2 Corinthians 4.

We'll take up the reading at verse 3 once again, page 1162, 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 3. But I want us to focus our attention particularly on verse 6, but we'll get the context by reading from verse 3.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

There are several places in the Bible where the message of the gospel can be summed up in one word.

[1 : 24] For example, it can be summed up in the word salvation. The gospel is about us being saved from sin and brought to God to fellowship with God.

So it's about salvation. It can also be summed up in the word life. Jesus came so that you may have life, so that we may have life in all its fullness.

And he said he came to give us everlasting life. It can be summed up in the word forgiveness. Jesus came into the world to give his life in order for us to be cleansed and to experience the forgiveness of God.

So the gospel can be summed up sometimes in one word. It's a bit of a dangerous thing to do that because you have to. The message of the gospel, of course, takes in so many different aspects. And yet there's sometimes when the gospel can be summed up.

But here the apostle Paul is summing up the gospel in this word light. And that's what I would like us to think about this morning in the context in which the apostle brings this message to us.

[2 : 28] Light. Now, it's not surprising that he should do so. Because if you remember way back on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9, when Saul of Tarsus, as he was then, made his way to Damascus to arrest those who belonged to the church, he suddenly saw a blinding light.

And that light meant the difference between Saul of Tarsus, who then and there came to a conclusion, he came to an end of his life, and the beginning of Paul the apostle, the man Saul of Tarsus, the old man Saul of Tarsus, who was so intent on destroying this gospel, met with Jesus and met with the light of Jesus, and that light blinded him for a while.

But it's interesting that when he describes the light of the gospel that he saw on the road to Damascus, he doesn't describe it in terms of his being blinded, that's nothing to him.

But the light that took away his darkness. Now, the interesting thing there is that if you were to meet Saul of Tarsus beforehand, and if you were to suggest to him that when it came to be right with God, he was blind and he was in darkness, he would have laughed at you.

Because if there was one man under the sun who thought that he was right with God, it was Saul of Tarsus. And he did everything in his power to make sure that he was right with God.

[3 : 58] And yet, when he comes to describe it later on, he tells us that his life was a mess. And that he, instead of being enlightened by his religion, he was actually walking in darkness.

He lived in darkness. That's the way he describes it to us. And here in this passage is a place where he describes that not only what happened to him, but what happens to every person that comes to know Jesus as their Savior.

I want us to look at the light that the apostle is talking about here in verse 6 in three ways. I want us to first of all see the place in which the light shines.

And he tells us here, it has shone in our hearts. The place in which the light shines. I want us to see secondly, the source of the light that shines in our hearts.

And he tells us again, for God, the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, God has shone in our hearts. So the source of this light, where the light comes from, is none other than God himself.

[5 : 11] And then thirdly, I'd like us to see, I'd like us to see the kind of light it is, the sort of light it is, or rather the nature of that light that he goes on to explain to us further on in this verse.

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So I think, I hope we're going to see three things.

It's the place in which the light shines, our hearts. The source of the light, God who said, let light shine in the darkness. And thirdly, the kind of light it is, the sort of light it is, the light of the glow, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

First of all then, the place in which our heart, in which that light shines, which is our hearts. Let me try and just sum up the context in which Paul is writing these words.

It's always useful. Let's never take the words of the Bible out of context. We always ask, why was it that Paul wrote these words? What is he trying to say? What's he arguing about?

[6 : 18] Who's he talking about? And what issue is he trying to resolve? What's he saying at this time? And the issue is simply this. What people saw in the Apostle Paul, the impression that they got out of him.

Let me explain it this way. Recently, I don't know if this has ever happened to you. Have you ever been in correspondence with somebody, maybe writing to someone, who lives, maybe a relative. You've never met that relative.

That relative lives in New Zealand or Australia or America or something like that. And you know that there's that relative and you've been writing to that person. Maybe in this modern day you send an email to that person and you've kind of got to know that person.

And you kind of form an impression. Now I know that my example is going to fall down completely because we have photographs. But let's imagine, let's imagine the only knowledge that you had of that person was the emails or the letters that you got or even if you talk to them briefly on the phone.

you always build up a picture of what that person is like or what that person is look like from the information that you have of that person. It happened to me recently. I was in correspondence with someone and it's happened to me a few times.

[7 : 29] And letter correspondence and email correspondence and even telephone. And you build up a picture of what that person looks like, don't you? And so at last you get to meet the person and this person who I was in correspondence, I thought this person was tall and had dark hair and was well built.

And when I met him, he was completely the opposite. Completely the opposite to what I'd imagined him to be. And the same is true when you come to think of the Apostle Paul.

When you think of his place in the Bible, you always, I mean I did anyway, you always kind of tend to think of him as big and impressive, well dressed, well spoken, not a hair out of place.

Every word in its proper place. Well educated. So he was well educated and he was going to really know, always knew what to say at the right time, on the right occasion. As soon as he walks into the room, everyone is overawed by his presence.

That's the kind of preacher you get on the God channel sometimes. You have to be very careful by the way, but not to, not to listen to someone just because they're impressive. What, what, what is important, what is important is the message that they preach, whether it's biblical, whether it's truly and thoroughly biblical or not.

[8 : 50] That's just an aside. But we are impressed by these things. Are we natural? Something in all of us that are impressed by what a person looks like and how a person comes across. That's what we, that's what we see.

Now, this was exactly the point because, you know, if we were to meet the Apostle Paul, you'd get the shock of your life because he was none of these things. He was plain.

He was ordinary. He wasn't out to impress anyone. He was just, in many ways, quite dull. And the people in Corinth, some, a group in Corinth had started moaning about this.

They were saying, well, what is this guy? Why are we listening to him? You know, look at him. Look at him. He really doesn't, he's not really very impressive at all, is he? And if he was, you would, and this was their argument, if this Apostle Paul was so great and so influential and so powerful, why is he not, why is his message not having more of an effect on the people to whom he's preaching?

Now, you might think it did have an effect and it did. There are many places in the Acts of the Apostles where wonderful things happened when Paul preached, but that didn't always happen. There were many, many times in the Apostle's life when he was disappointed, where he was, where he had to labor and he had to struggle and he had to be, he had to face all kinds of disillusionments and the kind of difficulties that every minister and every Christian has to face from time to time.

[10 : 24] So things didn't always go superbly well with the Apostle Paul and besides that, there were these people saying, well, if only Paul was a bit different and a wee bit more, a wee bit more impressive, a wee bit more good looking and big and with a bit more presence about him, we reckon that this message would have a much more powerful effect.

and they were starting even in this early gospel day to begin to try and change the appearance of the gospel so it would be more presentable to the outside world.

You know something? There is nothing presentable about the gospel. There is nothing cool about the gospel. There is nothing impressive about the gospel.

And if they didn't listen to Jesus, the Son of God, if they turned on him and they nailed him to a cross, what makes us think that by changing things a little bit that people are going to be any more impressed by our presentation of it?

We must never, ever think of the gospel in terms of slick professionalism. I am not saying that we shouldn't be clear. We should. Those of us who are ministers, those of us who are teachers, we must be as clear as we possibly can.

[11 : 41] And yet, for a very good reason, Paul insisted that his message must not be received on the basis of his professionalism or his coolness.

And I'll tell you what the reason was. The reason was that it's God's work and God must have the glory. We must never be able to take the glory or the credit to ourselves as human beings.

And that's what this group of people were doing. They were essentially trying to draw attention to themselves. They weren't particularly interested in whether Jesus was glorified.

They wanted by their own presentation, by their own professionalism, to be able to present the gospel in a more acceptable way. A way that would maybe attract a crowd, make it more attractive to people.

You can't do that with the gospel, says Paul, because it has never ever been popular. And that's not because there's anything wrong with the message.

[12 : 43] These people were trying to change the message. It's because of the condition of people who are listening to the message. It's not because there is a flaw in the gospel itself.

It's because, Paul tells us, the God of this world, he says, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

That is where the problem lies. And he goes on to tell us that there is a deep-seated utter darkness dwelling in the heart of every single man, woman, and child who lives in this world until that darkness is dispelled by the light of the gospel that God shines in that person's heart.

That's where the problem is and that's the only answer to that problem. God himself must shine his light in that person's heart. And you see it all the time, don't you?

Those of us who try and share from time to time the gospel with other people, you get the opportunity. Thankfully, with your friends or whatever, sometimes you get the opportunity to sit over a cup of coffee or over lunch and that person will say, well, tell us what it is to be a Christian.

[14 : 09] Why are you a Christian? I hope that we're always ready for that occasion. Why are you a Christian? Why do you believe in the Bible? Why do you go to church? Why are you a member? Why do you sit at the Lord's table? Why is it that you, tell me how you've written, I hope you're able to in your own way be able to say that.

But how often do we do that? We get that opportunity and at the end of a 10 minute, 15 minute discussion about in which you're able to tell them why does you believe in Jesus, they stop and they say, well, that's great for you but not for me.

It's happened to me hundreds of times. People say, well, I'm so glad that you're a Christian. I'm so pleased that you're a believer. That's so great. But yeah, it works for you but nah, not for me.

Why is it? Now, look at it this way. Okay, look at it this way. If the gospel is the truth, it's not a question, something is true not for one person without being true for another.

If the gospel is the truth and if today the whole of humanity is guilty of sin and if God's remedy for that sin was to send his own son into the world so that by his death on the cross we, by trusting in him could be saved from that sin, do you not think that logically that everyone in the world should be running to that place where they can be right with God?

[15 : 33] Do you not think that just sheer logic and reason and rationale alone would say that if that's the greatest problem that we have in the world which it is our separation from God do you not think that the message of the gospel would be the headline news every single day?

And it's not. And the reason it's not is because there's a veil there's a covering there's a cataract covering the eyes of every single human being until that veil is removed by the gospel.

That's the problem. that Paul is talking about. He's not saying that humankind is stupid. He's not saying that they're not intelligent.

He's not saying that they're incapable of any kind of outward moral good. Humankind is full of moral actions. People helping one another. People rescuing one another.

People loving one another. People being faithful to one another. Families and affection and love. Humankind is where you find all of these things. What the apostle Paul is saying is that all of these things may be true but when it comes to our relationship to God whether we're right with God or not the problem is this that there's a veil that blocks our way and until that veil is taken away the darkness is taken away then that person is not only going to be lost and the Bible tells us dead in sins that that person is not even going to know the way of removing that.

[17 : 10] The problem is you remember Bartimaeus the blind Bartimaeus who sat by the roadside begging when Jesus was coming through Jericho that day and it was when the people told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing that way that all of a sudden he began to shout.

So only when and the problem was this he couldn't even find his way to the very thing that he needed. In other words the very sickness or the very condition from which he needed to be healed was the very condition that kept him from being healed his blindness and that's the problem with what Paul is describing here the veil or the darkness that shrouds the hearts of every single one of us.

The very thing we need to be healed. So if today you're not Christian and you don't see why you should be a Christian I'm not surprised at that at all. That's a sign of the darkness of the Paul is talking about here.

The very fact today that you are saying well so be it. What time is it? When can I get home? That's the sign that you haven't begun to see your own condition condition and how much you need God and Jesus Christ in your life.

But Paul goes on and he tells you first of all talks about as we've seen the place where we need our hearts and when the Bible talks about our hearts we're talking about that place in which we love God.

[18 : 45] Remember how God said his very first commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and that's where we have gone wrong in the very first place.

So that's the place then where the light shines. But I want to talk about the source of this light. Now often I don't need to explain this at all I don't even need to give any examples or illustrations as to how important it is to have light.

Neither do I have to give examples as to why light is important. You take a darkened room for example. You can say that a darkened room is exactly the same room whether it's dark or whether it's light.

And in a sense you're right. Everything in that room is the same whether the light is on or whether the light is off. The difference is that you can see that everything is made clear by the light all of a sudden being switched on.

And you can see the condition of the room where all the furniture is. You can find your way. And the same is true if you're walking down the road or if you're walking on the moor late on a night time and you know of course how thick the darkness is in these parts where we live on a winter's night.

[19 : 56] Sometimes there's no stars, no moon and there's nothing but darkness. I'm sure we've all experienced it. That's why we absolutely have to have a torch. It's positively dangerous to go for a walk in some places without.

You could end up in a ditch or break your neck or your leg or whatever if you don't have the light. And we describe very often in terms of light and darkness the contrast between something.

We very often say that contrast between one thing and another is like night and day. And that's basic. Every single one of us knows what we're talking about when we talk in these terms.

This is what the Apostle Paul is talking about here when he describes the gospel. and he's going back to the very first words that God spoke at the beginning of life as we know it in Genesis chapter one.

We're so familiar with these words aren't we? We tend to lose sight of their impact and their significance. Let there be light.

[21 : 07] that's what God says. We read it from the beginning. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This is what it tells us. The earth was without form and void.

Now I don't know what that means. And darkness was over the face of the deep. That doesn't mean partial darkness. That means you could see nothing.

Nothing. Can you just imagine that? And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And then God said let there be light. And that was the micro second in which life as we know it came into being.

can you imagine the difference and the contrast between the darkness before in which you could see nothing. Not a single thing.

[22 : 14] So that's why we're so uncertain about this. The darkness was covering the whole earth. It was void. And then all of a sudden for the first time in the universe in time and in eternity for the first moment what belonged to God was shed abroad into the universe was shared throughout his creation whatever this creation amounted to at that particular time.

It was all of a so this was a momentous event in which what belonged to God the Bible tells us that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

So before that time there was God and the light that belonged to God and there was whatever there was. I don't know. But at that moment in time God made the conscious decision to extend his nature into his creation.

And that was the significance of that moment was that that was the starting point at which everything began everything that you and I know and are familiar with because it was from that moment that he went on to create the rest of the universe the sky the stars the sun the sea and all the animal life and vegetation and crowning the whole of his creation was mankind made in the image of God and it all began at that one singular moment when God he made light shine out of darkness.

What I'm trying to do is I'm trying to convey the significance of this moment in which God created the conditions for life as we know it.

[24 : 05] Everything that we know was begun at that particular moment and this was not just God revealing his power but this is God revealing himself to the universe.

He's extending himself. He's opening himself out to the universe and it's so in such a way that the universe can now know him and see him and experience him and know that there is a God because he has said let there be light.

and Paul is pointing out that God is also revealing his mercy in that statement as well.

You know when you think about it at that moment in time did God know the way that the universe would go? Did he know that the universe would become a fallen place that after finishing the work of his hands and creating human beings to reflect his image and his glory that they would deliberately disobey him and become separated from him and that through that sinfulness the world and the universe would become separate from him and it would become so spoiled and so stained and polluted and that the universe would rebel, that mankind would rebel against him.

Did he know at that particular moment when he said let there be light, the future of the universe? Of course he did.

[25 : 39] He wouldn't be God otherwise. That's the marvel isn't it? That knowing what was going to take place, knowing what was going to take place, he continued to create a universe to reflect his own glory.

And what's even more marvelous is this that he continued to say let there be light. he didn't stop. He could have.

He would have been well within his rights to destroy the whole of his creation but he didn't. He continued to say let there be light. That's what Paul is talking about in the gospel in which God continued to shine himself into the world to save the world and rescue the world and so that our sins could be forgiven in the person of his son.

Jesus said I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. And you know what the problem is? Of course we come back to the place in which the light shines.

That light Jesus said light is come into the world but that men love darkness rather than light. And the reason this world still continues to be such a fallen place and such a miserable place even after Jesus coming into the world is simply we don't want him.

[27 : 00] We didn't want him when he came in at first. When he came in at first we said crucify him. And if he came in again we would say the same thing because it doesn't matter with all the generations that pass.

We're not interested. We're just not interested. Why? Because we love darkness. That's what he says. We love darkness. Because as soon as we begin to face the light we have to face ourselves.

Because the light shines in our hearts and shows us all our ugliness and our sinfulness and that's what we can't face. But there's only one way to be reconciled to God and that is to see to face ourselves as we truly are in Jesus Christ.

So the source of this light is God. The source of the gospel is God. And once again we're faced with the grace of the incredible inexplicable grace of God in the gospel that in which he comes into a world that has gone so badly wrong.

so catastrophically wrong. And he says let there be light. Isn't that marvelous?

[28 : 09] Isn't that the best, the greatest message in the world? You know when you look at your television and you see the incredible suffering all over the world. You see the incredible ways in which humankind can be so cruel to one another.

you can see the incredible deception and corruption that there is all over the world. The pride. The self-centeredness all over the world. And you're left to thinking well what hope is there for this world?

What hope is there? What future is there for this world? People talk about solutions and answers and people talk about improvement and all these kind of things. We're kidding ourselves on.

The answer lies here. God who said let light shine after darkness is the only hope that this world has. And lastly in the third place I want us to see the kind of light it is.

Paul goes on to talk about the light, the nature of what he's talking about in verse 6. He says that gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 23] You might be saying today well how do I have this light? How do I have what you've been talking about? I can understand what the apostle is saying here. I can understand that the answer to my deepest personal problem lies with Jesus Christ.

I need to be right with God. How is it? How can I have this for myself? If I'm in darkness and if I'm blind like Bartimaeus how can I have this light? Well here we have Paul tells us.

Paul tells us where to go. He's like a sign post to us. You go to Jesus because Jesus came into the world to bring the light of God. He said he that has seen me has seen the Father.

God represented. Jesus represented God the Father when he came into this world to bring the message of the gospel and to lay down his own life on the cross.

But Paul uses specific language when he tells us that the light of God has come. He tells us that this is the kind it is. And it is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 31] Let's just try and unpack that little phrase in the five minutes that are left. First of all by asking what does glory mean? What does glory mean? Something glorious is something that takes your breath away.

Something in which you feel your heart is going to stop when you see it or when you hear it or when you experience it. You can experience it in some kind of human form like if you go and you hear the most beautiful singing from someone.

Someone who is outstandingly good at singing. You go and hear that person and that person begins and the place is like silent. And all you can hear is that person's voice and it like sends a shiver down your spine.

And you think wow. You can experience when you go to some of the great places in the world like the Grand Canyon. Some of the great wonders of the world.

And you all of a sudden come upon a place like this and you look at it and you think you just don't know what to say. Because it's glorious. glorious. That's what makes it glorious.

[31 : 43] And I'm talking about in a human sense. Or in the kind of nights that we have sometimes of dead of winter when there's no wind and when there's no clouds and you look up and you see as far as we can see it's the entirety of the universe that begs beggars belief that there's more to it than this but there is.

That's as much as we can see. And there's this just vastness of stars and galaxies. galaxies and it takes your breath away doesn't it? It's glorious.

It's when something's glorious. And the problem is this. It's simply this. It all comes down to this problem. That Jesus doesn't take our breath away.

Until the light of God begins to shine in our hearts. And all of a sudden someone in whom we paid no interest in the past all of a sudden begins to capture our interest.

And we begin to see him not just as one of the great men that lived in the history of humankind but someone who's absolutely essential for me today. And the only person that can reconcile me to God and through whom I can have a relationship with God in him.

[33 : 00] And only when we see his glory. When we see his glory. Only when he begins to have that effect upon us that will deeply impact our lives.

And it can happen. It doesn't have to happen suddenly. Some people have a sudden experience of Jesus in which all of a sudden like Saul of Tarsus our eyes are open and that's it.

But often it happens in a slower manner than that. Like what I just described. The important thing is that our hearts become opened.

And we become willing to see Jesus because you have to look at Jesus in order to see him. And the answer to our greatest need is to look.

That's what God said in the prophecy. He said look unto me all ends of the earth and be saved. It's when we see the glory of Jesus Christ. Now there were many times when the disciples and it was by being with Jesus that the disciples saw the glory of Jesus.

[34 : 06] It was by being with him and making a point of looking at him and listening to him so that as they looked and they listened they're understanding. See what Paul is saying? The light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

You'll never have that knowledge unless you expose yourself to the teaching and to the life of Jesus Christ. That's why reading the Bible is so important. That's why listening to God's word is so important.

That's why it's important to come to God personally, yourself and ask Lord, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things from your word. That's what the psalmist said.

Open my eyes. Have you prayed that? I dare you to pray it. Pray it. Ask the Lord to open your eyes and to take away the veil and the covering and the shadow that prevents you from seeing the glory of Jesus Christ.

There were several times when the disciples saw the glory of Jesus Christ. There was that time, for example, when three of them were invited up to the mountain with Jesus where he was transfigured before them and there they saw his heavenly glory in his face and his clothes shining like the sun.

[35 : 16] But you know, we're quite mistaken to believe that that was the only time they saw it. The Bible tells us there were other occasions when they were able to perceive at this time there was the disciples but there were also other people as well.

Crowds of other people. Like for example, in John chapter 2 when Jesus was invited to the wedding in Cana in Galilee and where he, where there was a crisis there and when they ran out of wine and where they, where they asked him, his mother asked him if he could help, if he could do something and remember what he did?

He took these pictures of water, these great giant pictures of water and he changed the water, transformed it into wine. And this is the effect, this is what I'm coming to.

Verse 11 tells us this, the first of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

When you think about it, I'm going to leave you with this. When you think about it tonight, you take all the important things in your life, everything you think about, everything you're involved in, all your intentions, your dreams, your wishes, the things you live for in this life.

[36 : 37] I'm sure there are many of them. You're not alone. Life is full of great things, aren't there? It's just absolutely marvellous. I know that there are things, there are sorrows, there are difficulties, there are perplexing things in life and yet none of us would choose not to live because of life and the meaning that life has for each one of us.

Isn't that the case? Do you not think if this message is the truth, that it should be top of the agenda?

Do you not agree with me when I say that everything that we live for needs to be focused and oriented in Jesus? The only reason it's not is because you haven't yet seen his glory.

I'll tell you this, as soon as you begin to see the glory of Jesus, your life's going to change. You're going to live for him and he's going to take center stage and everything else.

You know what the hymn says? Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Jesus. Look full in his glorious face.

[37 : 52] Then it goes on to say this, the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Turn your eyes upon him. Let's pray. Our Father, we need you to shine your light in our hearts and where that light has been obscured by our own foolishness and whatever has dimmed that light, we pray that you will take away anything in our hearts and in our lives that prevents the fullness of that light flooding our hearts and showing us, Lord, that this world is not going to last forever, but that we need to focus our attention and give it all to Jesus and him alone.

Lord God, we pray that you will shine your light in our hearts so that we become aware of how great Jesus is and that he is worthy of our honor and our service and our obedience and our love with our whole heart.

In Jesus' name, Amen.